CATFIGHT

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"Good evening, this is 880 AM radio, and you're listening to 'Talk of the Town', where tonight's subject is 'What do you think is the greatest threat to America today?'. Some of tonight's callers have said...."

The cats fight in the street at night. No one ever tries to stop the cats, and no one sees why anyone should. The cats just go out there and fight until one of them retreats. I watch them fight sometimes. One of them prowls his territory as the street lies in wait. The crickets become silenced when the second cat appears. The two cats' glimmering eyes glare at each other as they dash around the street in circles. They run in silence until they meet. Then, the neighborhood sleep wakes suddenly. Lights flash on, doors open, and two cats scurry off into the night.

Come morning, families around the block seek to discover if the catfight involved their feline. Occasionally a cat is wounded. These are the fights that people remember. The fights where blood shows.

However, it's not midnight yet, and the cats haven't been let out of their houses. It's 8:50 p.m.

"Good evening, you're on 'Talk of the Town'!"

No reply.

"Yes! You're on live radio!"

No reply.

"Thousands of people are listening, hanging on your every word."

No reply.

"On a tape delay basis."

"Oh! Am I on?"

"Naw! We're just crank callers here. Only unusual thing is that you call us to be cranked!"

No reply.

"Fœrget it!" And the phone dropped.

It's time. I know it's time. It's time for someone to tell us that he is the salvation. It's time for someone to write music that everyone will understand. It's time for us to drop our guns and read the patterns in the wind. It's time for us to realize it's time, because it <u>is</u> time.

My room is dark and quiet. Except for the barely audible AM radio, my breathing is the only sound. Sweatshirts, socks, and pants are scattered around the room. I am lying on my bed looking out the window next to me at the street outside.

It is very calm and very cool outside.

A typewriter is lying in a corner of my room, hidden under the sleeve of a sweatshirt and the smelly end of a sock. I might release myself and get up to write something on it, but I probably won't. I have written a lot of poetry before, but everybody writes poetry. Anybody can write poetry. A person could sit down and write something that makes sense to neither him nor the rest of the world, but one person will assume its' unintelligibility imbues it with deep and profound meaning. That's just the way the world works....the poet writes the words and everyone else tells him what they mean.

"It's 8:59 p.m., and we're not going to have time for another caller, so we'll be back in a few minutes after NBC News to continue our program. Once again, tonights' subject is 'What do you think is the greatest threat to America today?'"

What an interesting question that is. I should call the station and say something like herpes. That redneck host they've got would probably laugh and hang up like he did earlier to that woman who didn't know she was on the air.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Brown?"

"Oh....nothing."

"Constipation?"

"And I'm not thrilled with my laxative."

Commercials. I wish they would just go away. All a laxative does is make you fart.

"....and watch the pain just disappear overnight."

I wish it was that simple.

"Good evening, this is Gene Keller."

"In the news this evening, the Ku Klux Klan has staged another march under protest...."

"Okay! We're back on 'Talk of the Town', where tonight's subject is...."

I slowly phase out the radio and listen to sounds from outside. My window is open. I can hear an orchestra of crickets and a couple of men talking loudly on a neighbor's back porch. I'm not really paying attention to what is being said, but I hear something concerning a confusion of who was the algebra teacher and who was the science teacher in high school.

A soft breeze is coming from the east. A dog is urinating on someone's mailbox. An orange falls from the tree in the front yard and rolls a few feet to a peaceful rest. I decided that that was the most significant event, the orange falling, because I've never seen an orange fall from a tree at 9:13 p.m. on a night as cool as this. Come to think of it, I've never seen an orange fall from a tree.

"Dammit, John, that nigger was the biggest Jesus freak that high school had ever seen....", one of the two male voices boomed into the night. It seemed like the whole neighborhood must have heard him say that and I thought I could sense the whole neighborhood turning an ear to the conversation.

"He wasn't any nigger." 'Nigguh' was how he said it. "Wendall Norman. Now there was a nigger. That nigger brought his lunch to school wrapped in the same old shirt every day."

"Naaaaw! That Jesus freak was a nigger in capital letters."

I tuned them out.

Prejudice is everywhere. It's on the radio. It's on the suburban back porches. It's on the breeze coming from the east. It's in the schools. Prejudice is everywhere, and everywhere it's time.

"Personally, I think the greatest threat to America today is the way the schools...."

It's now 10:23 p.m. I seem to have dozed off after that person started talking about schools. While I was asleep, I dreamed. And what a strange dream it was! I was standing alone in a huge field when I started running. I kept running until I reached a huge balcony that overlooked a black

emptiness. For some reason, in the dream, I knew that I was at the end of the world. Then I said, "So the world isn't round." But no one heard me. Only myself and my God.

The balcony was rather strange. There were faces molded into the floor of the balcony that were those of human faces. When I turned to them, they looked at me despairingly and said, "Leave! Leave! You'll regret staying here. We are not what we appear to be. Leave! LEAVE!!"

But they were faces of people I didn't know. Then they repeated themselves..."Stay away. We are not what we appear to be. We are not real. We are making a show for you. Shy away from us. We are actors. We are not what we appear to be." All of the faces repeated this dialogue except for one particular face. That face seemed not to care at all what the others were saying, and only looked their way occasionally.

I ran from the balcony and across the field to where I was originally. There was one big difference though. There was an enormous giant stomping my way. His face, at first hard to see, was that of one of the faces on the balcony.... the face that was silent. The giant, however, never came near me, and even seemed to be ignoring me, but the fear of hell went through me when I saw him. I ran off in the opposite direction of the seemingly endless field. Just when I thought I had escaped the giant his face, huge and clear, emerged out

of the sky. It came directly at me with a mouth opened to scream. Sirens, however, were the sounds coming out of his mouth. As the mouth prepared to envelop me, I woke up, but the faces of the people on the balcony and especially of the giant are etched clearly and forever in my mind.

It's time. I don't know what it's time for. I just know it's time for something important to happen to me, and it's coming soon.

Those two men are still talking on the neighbor's back porch next door. The conversation has turned from who's a nigger and who isn't to more prime time topics such as who was gay and who wasn't and to old girlfriends. It's things like getting together with old friends and talking about old times that make me dread getting any older than I already am. From the way the conversation outside is flowing, I'm almost sure I won't enjoy talking about old times twenty years from now.

The hour is fast approaching. It's 11:55 p.m. The cats probably won't come out at exactly twelve, but it should be close.

The five minutes to twelve pass by like a bolt.

The cats emerge. All is silent. The men who were talking outside have long since gone in. I am deaf to the radio. I

can see the cats' eyes glimmering under the street light that will spotlight the long awaited catfight. The cats prance the street with staccato steps that are soundless. The crickets are silenced again. The neighborhood sleeps. The cats are in the dream that haunts the neighborhood's sleep. It seems an eternity while they race around in circles anticipating and plotting their next maneuver.

At once they stop and stare. "At last we meet again," one of them says. In a fleeting glimpse I see one of them leap from his solitary position and go hurtling through the air at his intended victim. I close my eyes and see the sound. I see the sound of claws invading soft fur. I see the sound of pain in the animal. I see the sound of vicious animals ripping away at each other's very being. I see the sound of one cat running away to his home. The sound stops, and all is silent again. Tonight, sirens wake the night. Tonight, someone has called the police. Tonight, a child has lost her only pet, and she cries into the night, for tonight, a cat lies dead in the middle of the street.

Sirens grow closer. Sirens arrive. I open my eyes. The giant from my dream steps out of a flashing automobile and takes charge of the situation. More sirens arrive. Faces from a dream flock around the giant. They are not what they appear to be. The sound of sirens stops. The scene is still

lit by the same towering street light. No one touches the cat.

"Boss," one of the faces says. "HQ, on the talkie."

The boss holds the CB speaker firmly in his hand. "Yeah, what is it?" he says wearily.

Static. Hiss. Noise. "Gotcha!" he says into the speaker, seeming to understand what was said. "All right", he says to the gathered crowd of sleepwalkers dressed in robes, towels, Mudd and curlers. "Everybody back inside. That's all the excitement for tonight." He turns to his assistant. "C'mon, Frank, let's clean this mess up."

The group of people reluctantly moves away. Police car engines hum into the night. The cat still lies dead. Moths obscure the light from the street light. The Boss looks exasperated. He stands away from the rest.

"Hey, boss. The rest of the neighborhood doesn't even know it."

"Yeah, Thanks, Frank."

Frank walks away and the boss is left standing alone again. I hear him say in a soft whisper, as if only himself and his God were to hear him...."Maybe the world isn't round."

Beacons streak across his face at equal intervals. He has seen the pain. Another car arrives, interrupting the silence. Two men get out of the car, faceless and mindless.

One carries a large plastic bag, the other, a shovel. The dead animal is shoveled into the bag and the bag is dumped into the trunk of the car. The car drives off into the mysterious night that I have yet to discover. The boss still stands alone with the beacon blessing his face at equal intervals. The hum of the one remaining cars' engine brings the night into tune. Frank sits alone reading a newspaper and puffing a cigar. He grows impatient and finally pulls the cigar out of his mouth and sticks his head out of the car window. "Hey! C'mon! Let's get kickin'!"

The boss turns his head slightly, acknowledging the existence of the underpaid assistant to the chief. "I'll be there in a second, Frank. Just hold on."

Frank's head goes back into the window in haste as he presses out his cigar and then takes a swig out of his sweating cup of Coke. He wipes the cool cup across his sweaty forehead and begins breathing more relaxed. His face is nearly invisible in the darkness, but his facial characteristics rise out of the dark of the police cars' insides. He is just an ordinary man getting by in a corrupt world, as is the boss.

"BOSS! C'mon! It's time to go....c'mon....it's time ....y'know....time...."

"Yeah," the boss says in a lost tone. His shadow is

cast onto the street and is interrupted by the hulking figure of the police car. He stares blankly at the site which the dead cat used to occupy. Blood still remains, the outline of the cats' fallen body. "I'm comin'. I guess it is time."

"Damn right!" Frank says. "Let's blow this joint. I've got better things to do."

The boss slowly and solemnly turns to his car. His slumping head and sagging neck turn before he opens the car door to take one last look at the site of the killing. He gets into his car. It was time, but the time has passed. He has a wife to go home to. He has a family. Frank has better things to do. He also has a family. The boss flips on the radio. It is on 880 AM.

"880 AM radio is a public service of the Griffin Broadcasting Company. 880 AM will now be leaving the broadcast airwaves until 6:00 a.m. this morning. Questions or comments concerning the operation of this station...."

The police car disappears and the radio continues in my room. 880 AM will now be signing off until 6:00 a.m. The police car vanishes into the night. Everyone is back in bed. The neighborhood sleeps once again. The nightmare of the catfight woke the night but, like any other nightmare, people recover and go back to sleep. The fallen orange lies peacefully on the ground. Blood still stains the street. The

catfight has relieved me of all anxiety, but I will wake tomorrow and find that it was all a dream. Nothing was real. But I can sleep in comfort now, because there will never be another catfight.

THE END